

# TAURANGA ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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## A fantastic sight.....!



16<sup>th</sup> January 2007. Comet McNaught taken just before sunset, out at Gisborne.

Photographer; John Burt

## Comet News.....

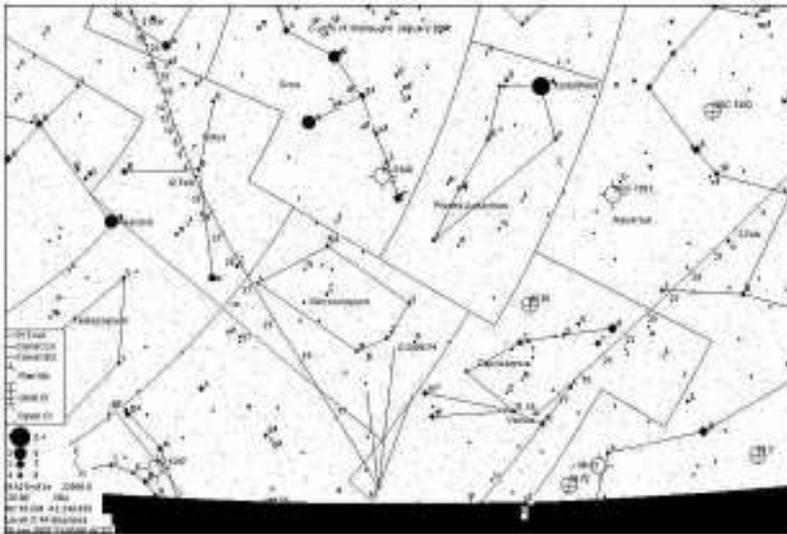
This information is from one of our more experienced amateur astronomers, Ian Cooper, of Palmerston North. Read on.....

Hi All,

If you haven't been watching [Spaceweather.com](http://Spaceweather.com) and other sites highlighting the comet named above then it's time to do so.

If you check out the images being sent in you may not at first be impressed with what appears to be a small comet in the twilight. The fact that you can actually see a comet in bright twilight should send out a message that we have something special about to enter southern evening skies by the end of January. The comet is steadily brightening in high northern latitude evening twilight and is set reach a peak magnitude at perihelion of anywhere between mag. -0.8 to -8.7. Soho will start to pick the comet up in its' Lasco camera from Sunday (14th) morning NZ time through to Wednesday morning. If, and that is a big IF, the comet reaches anything greater than mag. -5 then there could be a very good chance that the comet will be visible to the naked-eye, or at the very least in binos or a telescope.

By the end of next week C/2006 P1 McNaught will start to emerge from the evening twilight in Microscopium heading up into Indus



(see chart attached, courtesy of <http://www.yip-connect.net/~mmatti/> ).

in our evening sky as it plunged towards perihelion. It can be very difficult to make a good estimate when there are so few stars visible. Once West disappeared from our skies it emerged in the pre-dawn sky of the northern hemisphere. Nobody was prepared for the view that graced those northern skies for a week or so. Comet West had broken into four nuclei, and the ensuing dust tail was the most impressive of the 20th Century

When the comet is first emerging from the bright twilight on the 17th onwards you can use Venus, Fomalhaut and the brighter stars of Grus, Indus and

Pavo to locate it. If however the comet attains a high magnitude then you won't need anything except a clear sky to see it.

Fingers crossed that McNaught starts 2007 off with a blazing display that will live long in the memory. If McNaught breaks up a la West then the show will really be on! Thanks Ian.

And here are some comments from other astronomers around the country;

Hi All. SOHO has got its first good look at this puppy, and oh boy, that's impressive.

<http://sohowww.nascom.nasa.gov/data/realtime/c3/512/> It must be brighter than Venus now, easily... I sure hope the weather plays ball, cos this is gonna be a beauty.. Yeeharr! Graham, Hastings



We just returned from our new section North of Nelson and enjoyed the Comet complete with wine, cheese, crackers and my 20x100. Magic. The tail was easily 2 degrees in the binoculars at times I suspected longer but I couldn't see any detail. The tail had pretty sharp edges (not diffuse). Rudy, Nelson

Hi everyone,

Certainly a stunning view of the comet from up on the Port Hills in Christchurch this evening. Ian Crumpton, Euan Mason, Larry Field and I, plus other members of the Canterbury Astronomical Society, and a good number of members of the public, ended up in a slightly off-road spot.

As the sun set, the high cloud seemed to thin out, the comet fast became visible, about 10 degrees directly above the setting sun. It is certainly bright - we all agreed it is still brighter than Venus. The tail also easily visible, and we could see that from our vantage point for

many minutes after the head of the comet had set.

I just hope we get clear evening skies over the next week or so as the comet climbs higher in the sky each evening. Dennis, Christchurch.

As Dennis said, we had a great time on the Port Hills, with every man and his dog showing up after we set up our gear. The dog even had a rear bike light on his collar so that cars wouldn't run over him.

The attached images show the comet at maximum visibility. It was really cool the way it just kept on getting better. Best views were had through giant binos. Euan, Christchurch

Further information can be found at



<http://newsletter.carterobservatory.org/2007/Comet/> .

or [www.carterobservatory.org](http://www.carterobservatory.org) .

Martin McKenna has an excellent image gallery from around the Northern Hemisphere. It's worth a look.

<http://www.nightskyhunter.com/Comet%20Mc%20Naught%20Gallery.html>

And for Tauranga?? Some of the high cloud we are experiencing is due to the effects of the Australian bush fires. As the wind swings towards the east we may have some luck from the end of this week, especially as all the other cloud is expected to disperse.....??

Due to the proximity of the Sun, the comet is best viewed at sunset, so find a high point, and look towards the Kaimais. At present the distance is about 10 degrees , or a fist width at arm's length. Good luck.

## Christmas visit to Whakatane



The Whakatane Astronomical Society's Observatory with the sliding roof open on both the near room with the 14 inch telescope and the 6 inch in the far room.



Whakatane President Norman Izett, Pam Kilmartin and guest speaker Alan Gilmore.



Around the barbecue with Pres. George's wife Dorothy in centre and Les Smith at left.

Left and below are two pictures of Whakatane's magnificent 14 inch telescope which in my opinion is what we should be thinking about after we get our observatory built.

Above right is their 6 inch telescope and it appears they have a solar filter for this and watch the sunspots through it.

We paid attention to the observatory construction and especially the sliding roof noting the wheels it runs on.

Dorothy Stewart is on the right hiding under the bright red jacket



## Further Society Information

Our first meeting of the year is on Wednesday January 24<sup>th</sup>. Ted Harper will be our speaker for the evening. We would also like a clear night in order to view The Comet.....

As newsletter editor, I am keen to try out a different format to what is currently produced. At the moment this is being created as a Word document. I would like to re-format as a PDF document, which means that you need the Adobe Acrobat Reader program available on your computer. As far as I know, a lot of people now have this program as a matter of course, but if you have any queries or worries, please let me know either by phone or email - see below.

## TROG.....Tauranga Roaming Observers Group

This is a phone/email list which you can put your name down for if you are interested in 'spur of the moment' observing. This has normally been down at Fergusson Park in Matua, Tauranga, but other sites are being checked out constantly. Contact Andrew or Jim if you are interested in joining the observing group. Andrew Walker has agreed to help man this list too, so you could co-ordinate a time/place with him if you are keen to go out. Andrew's phone number is 573 8550.

### **NOTE: Public Meeting Visitors;**

Casual visitors to public meeting nights will be able to come along free of charge for two public meetings or viewing nights, thereafter a charge of \$5 per meeting or viewing night if the person does not pay the annual subscription.

*Ursula Macfarlane*

*Newsletter editor*